



#Africa4Her: Ten Exemplary Pledges to Invest in Women and Girls

This March, YALI Network members have made the commitment to invest in women and girls in Africa, not only to help achieve gender equality, but also to promote economic growth, good governance, and future innovation. Women and girls are often the foundation of a community, and it is essential that they are given the same opportunities as men for that nation to grow. More than 700 YALI Network members pledged to invest in women and girls, and many of these pledges have already been put into action. Below is just a sample of the amazing and creative pledges that were made this month.

1. Leadership development training for 25 Cameroonian women; create Young Women's Advocacy Network:

Patience Agwenjang from Cameroon pledges to organize a six-month leadership development training course for 25 women and to create the Young Women's Advocacy Network to support effective policy on gender issues and good governance. 

2. Mentor young female victims of human trafficking in Nigeria:

Lawrenta Igoh from Nigeria pledges to mentor girls who have been victims of human trafficking by organizing training sessions on reproductive health and life-building skills to help prepare them to adjust to society and decrease their vulnerability to being re-trafficked. 


3. Feature business women in an entrepreneurship magazine:

Mothibedi Sereme from South Africa pledges to help young women through a local entrepreneurship magazine that he publishes by featuring articles and bios on successful female entrepreneurs. He will also host a seminar on leadership and higher education for young women at which inspiring businesswomen will speak to girls about their role in the economy and the importance of education.


4. Empower young women through poetry:

Mercedes Leburu pledges to help empower other young women in South Africa to become confident and lead a liberated lifestyle through writing poetry that will boost their self-esteem.

5. Educate young girls about protected sex and how to grow produce successfully:

Noel Lutomia in Kenya pledges to help young women start small income-generating projects, such as small crop farming, that would earn them independence from men and decrease their vulnerability to sexual predators. 

6. Help girls continue their education by providing sanitary napkins:

James Obare Ondongo from Kenya pledges to help increase the chances for girls' education in two primary schools by distributing sanitary napkins so girls can attend school regularly during their monthly cycles. 

7. Organize art workshops to help women network and empower them through their own creativity:

Kunle Adewale from Nigeria pledges to invest in women by holding workshops with a focus on therapeutic art and vocational skills. The art produced at these workshops will be publicly displayed and put up for auction, with the profits going directly back to the women and girls who participate.

8. Hold a conference for young women in business to expand their horizons and share ideas:

Nathacia Oliver from South Africa pledges to initiate the first “Young Women Thrive” business conference, where young female entrepreneurs can gather to network and collaborate on new and exciting business ideas.

9. Tutor female classmates in a course:

Samuel Ndhlovu from Zambia pledges to assist two of his classmates in a course that he is doing well in by tutoring them three days a week.

10. Organize a training workshop for women in small-scale dairy production:

Khalid Ngassa from Tanzania pledges to organize and host a four-day training workshop for women who run small-scale dairy production operations as a part of the Nronga Women’s Dairy Cooperative Society. He will teach them about business efficiency and how to maximize their profits using their available resources.

Mentors Help Guide Entrepreneur’s Businesses

Cynthia



Nigerian entrepreneur Cynthia proved that there is financial and environmental value in cassava peels.

A finalist in the 2014 Global Innovation through Science and Technology competition and a YALI Network member, Cynthia developed a way to convert cassava peels into nutritious goat feed. Farmers had perceived the peels as a useless byproduct and burned them as a cheap way of disposal. But that practice releases harmful pollutants into the atmosphere.

Nigeria is the world’s largest producer of cassava, each year growing 40 metric tons and generating 12 million metric tons of peels. When burned, those peels release more than 10 million tons of toxic carbon monoxide in the air.


Cynthia's solution to the problem begins with a simple platform on which peels are dried. The dried peels are packaged and sold as a healthy goat feed. By selling both food products derived from the cassava tuber and animal feed, farmers can utilize 100 percent of their plants and boost their incomes. "This is something the community embraces with joy and excitement," Cynthia says.

In 2013, Cynthia, 24, founded the social enterprise Kadosh Production Company in Delta state to recycle cassava waste. The venture also helps small-scale farmers get credit so they can purchase drying platforms, and it links cassava growers and processors with goat-farmer customers. With an eye set on expansion to other countries, Cynthia says she hopes her business will grow to be "a major influence in the Nigerian economy and Africa at large."

Cynthia has a bachelor's degree in textile science and polymer technology and a master's in business administration from Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria. She says that since she was young, her parents have inspired her to go into business.

Further inspiration came later when Cynthia volunteered to work for a year at a woman-owned bakery "to learn how to run a business of my own." At the bakery she learned about the challenges associated with running a business and how to handle those challenges. The experience "made me confident that I could run my own business," she says.

Cynthia received further business advice from a U.S. mentor — a former United Parcel Service executive. Gary Mastro is one of many experienced businesspeople [MicroMentor](#) has matched with young entrepreneurs around the world. MicroMentor is an initiative of the nonprofit humanitarian group Mercy Corps based in Oregon. More than half of the entrepreneurs who request its help are from outside the United States, the group notes.

Cynthia, center, stands with some of the  entrepreneurs she has mentored and their supporters.

Cynthia's first venture was a liquid soap company called EverGlow that makes an affordable, hygienic alternative to bar soap. "Gary is a pillar in my business and a man I respect so much," she says.

And now Cynthia is a mentor herself. In 2013 she founded Confident Women to mentor young women and teach them about home management, family relationships and how to make liquid soap so they could start their own small-scale businesses. The businesswoman later changed the name of Confident Women to the CAMY Foundation after collaborating with a partner in Zimbabwe who wanted a similar mentoring model in her country. CAMY Foundation now has more than 450 women members in Nigeria and Zimbabwe.

Cynthia says she communicates regularly with other YALI Network members who tell her about what is happening in other countries and let her "see the great work young leaders like me are doing."

"This encourages me a lot to keep up the work and never give up so we can have a better future." She adds that she learns a lot from the ongoing [YALIChat](#) Twitter conversation.

Cynthia encourages other YALI Network members and potential members to “maximize the opportunities from YALI Network” and to “be a change in their society.”

Learn more about the [GIST Tech-I business pitch competition](#).

[#YALICHAT with the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, Cathy Russell](#)

Cathy Russell serves as the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues. Previously she served at the White House, coordinating the development of the Obama Administration's strategy to prevent and respond to gender-based violence globally. Join Ambassador Russell ([@AmbCathyRussell](#)) for a Twitter #YALICHAT on Wednesday, March 18th at 13:00 UTC. Additional details below.



u
ssell visits girls at a school in Zambia

As young African leaders and followers of the YALI Network, you already know that the United States invests in women and girls because it's the right thing to do for gender equality and the smart thing to do for our foreign policy.

When policies and programs consider women and girls, they're more successful. They promote stronger democracies and more durable peace agreements. They increase food security and make for healthier families. They improve public service delivery. And they lead to fewer conflicts and more rapidly growing economies.

As the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, it's my job to work with my colleagues across the U.S. government and with leaders around the world to advance the status of women and girls worldwide. Every day I talk with government officials, world leaders, and women and girls around the world about how women have contributed to global progress and why we need to break the barriers keeping women and girls from fully participating in society.

Earlier this month, I had the privilege of presenting ten women from ten countries with the Secretary of State's [International Women of Courage Award](#). These women, including Marie Claire Tchecola from Guinea and Beatrice Epaye from the Central African Republic, have shown exceptional courage and leadership in advocating for women's rights and empowerment.

As an emergency room nurse in Guinea, Marie Claire Tchecola has been on the front lines of the fight against Ebola. When she became infected with the Ebola virus, she took precautions to protect other workers and her family from contracting the disease - and when she recovered, she went back to work. Through her leadership in the Ebola Survivors Association of Guinea, Marie Claire continues to spread awareness about the disease and fight the stigma associated with its survivors.

When Seleka rebels stormed the streets of Bangui and overtook the Central African Republic's capital, one of their first stops was the office of Beatrice Epaye, an outspoken activist who raised her voice to condemn the horrors of civil war and to call for peace, human rights, and good governance. Refusing to be intimidated, Beatrice took to the radio and met with local and international organizations, eventually becoming the president of the Preparatory Committee for the National Dialogue.

Ms. Tchecola and Ms. Epaye are proof of how women can and do transform societies with little fanfare through their everyday actions. Yet in every country - from Guinea to Germany to Guatemala - women and girls face challenges and barriers that keep them from fully participating. A family may choose to send a son, but not a daughter, to school because there's only enough money for one child's fees. A woman may be kept from launching a new business because she can't access capital. Or bias and stereotypes about women's roles in society will keep a woman from her rightful seat at the peacekeeping table or in Parliament.

It will take all of us - men and women, boys and girls - to achieve the progress we need to unleash the power of women and girls. But if every one of us takes action, we can break down these barriers and open doors for women and girls of courage.

I urge you all, both my fellow women and our male allies, to [take the #Africa4Her pledge](#) and tell us how you will invest in women and girls. Show us how you will raise, educate, protect, support, mentor, and elevate the many women and girls of courage in your life.

Join the YALICHAT on Wednesday, March 18th at:

12:00-13:00 Cape Verde Time (CVT)

13:00-14:00 UTC/GMT

14:00-15:00 West Africa Time (WAT)

15:00-16:00 Central Africa (CAT) and South Africa Standard Time (SAST)

18:00-19:00 Eastern Africa Time (EAT)

19:00-20:00 Seychelles and Mauritius (SCT/MUT)

IMF Chief Christine Lagarde on Leadership and Crisis Management

The following are excerpts of an interview by Lillian Cunningham published July 13 in the Washington Post.

Question: How do you define leadership?

Answer: To me, leadership is about encouraging people. It's about stimulating them. It's about enabling them to achieve what they can achieve — and to do that with a purpose.

Others would call it a “vision” but I'd rather use “purpose” because I think that everybody has a purpose in life and that when collectively people work together or practice sport together, they have a joint purpose.

Q: How have you transitioned between managing short-term and long-term challenges?

A: On dealing with [an IMF internal crisis and an external crisis when I arrived], it was a question of making sure that everybody was on deck, prepared to deal with the issues and completely motivated by the mission of the fund — which is to make sure that we put all our expertise, our money, our technical assistance and our ability to advise together to fight the crisis and to procure some stability.

I have a theory that women are generally given space and appointed to jobs when the situation is tough. I've observed that in many instances. In times of crisis women eventually are called upon to sort out the mess, face the difficult issues and be completely focused on restoring the situation.

Q: Have you learned anything about your own leadership skills or weaknesses from leading during a time of crisis?

A: I learned that you can constantly improve and that you should not be shy about your views and about the direction that you believe is right.

I also learn constantly about how much people can achieve, how much they can give, how much they can go beyond themselves, step out of their comfort zone and give a lot more than they ever thought they would or that you ever expected them to do.

And it's a constant process to learn how much you should step in after having listened and how much the team you work with can exceed your expectations.

Q: Words that constantly come up in describing you are “charismatic,” “presence,” “ability to command a room.” Do you have any advice on how to cultivate those traits?

A: It's a question of feeling confident about yourself — being reconciled with your own identity and

your own body. ... The second step is about being honest and telling the truth.

Q: What's the best piece of leadership advice anyone's given you?

A: There's one encouragement that I was given once by my American father in the family I stayed with when I was 17. Whenever I had tough times he would say: "Don't let the [negative people] get you." [That means] Hang on with the work that you are doing and just don't give up.

Stand up.

Photo credit: AP Images

Latest World Food Prize Laureate on Leadership

Sanjaya Rajaram believes that leadership can come with time.

Rajaram, who was just named the 2014 World Food Prize Laureate, led for decades the wheat-breeding program at the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) in Mexico.

As a young scientist at CIMMYT, "it took me some time before I could develop some of the skills in leadership," said the successful Indian-born researcher. "I was able to recognize very early that there has to be a good balance in productivity and in people's aspirations."

"For me, the central core of leadership is team building, getting the best people to work together and recognizing each individual for their contribution to a common goal," Rajaram said.

Rajaram claims the noted plant pathologist, World Food Prize founder and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Norman Borlaug as his main inspiration as a scientist and as a leader. He was highly influenced by fellow India native M.S. Swaminathan, who taught him about genetics, and by other agricultural researchers. "I basically heard these people talk about their philosophies, and that was enough for me," he said.

After his time at CIMMYT, Rajaram became director of the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), part of the same international research consortium that includes CIMMYT. He then moved to a private plant-breeding program in Mexico working on wheat and barley.

"Dr. Rajaram has helped to feed millions of people across the world through his lifetime of research and innovation," U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said.

Rajaram noted that scientists of all ages who work to improve the quality and quantity of food accept that their work will have both successes and failures. "There are failures in most innovations.

Indeed, in agricultural innovations, and especially in plant breeding, there are more failures than success,” he said.

Speaking of young people considering taking up agriculture as a career, Rajaram said: “I believe today’s youth would be very much interested in agriculture as a career if they understood the importance of food, nutrition, health, the environment and related issues.”

“We need leaders to talk to youth in language they can understand,” Rajaram said.

Photo credit: World Food Prize

Basketball Star Dikembe Mutombo on Sports, Leadership

“You cannot succeed in life if you don’t know how to work with people, just like you cannot win a game without your teammates.”

That is what basketball great Dikembe Mutombo told young African leaders taking part in a June 26 live Twitter chat. For more than an hour, Mutombo, who was born and raised in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), responded to questions about topics ranging from sports and leadership to gender equality and his charitable health care foundation. The chat was the latest in a series hosted by the U.S. Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) Network.

Mutombo, who serves as a global ambassador for the National Basketball Association (NBA), said future leaders need to stay focused. “You cannot let anything distract you when you’re trying to achieve something. You have to keep the course.”

Mutombo came to the United States from Kinshasa at the age of 19 to study medicine at Georgetown University on a scholarship. At 2.18 meters tall, he soon was recruited to play on the university’s highly regarded basketball team. After graduating in 1991 with bachelor’s degrees in linguistics and diplomacy, Mutombo was drafted by the Denver Nuggets. He played for five other NBA teams before retiring in 2009.

For Mutombo, the value of sport goes beyond spirited competition. “Sport isn’t about your height, your race, your gender. It’s about your ability to perform,” the athlete said. “Sport is an activity that brings people together” and can teach players “soft skills” such as ethics and communications.

The now-retired basketball player leads the Dikembe Mutombo Foundation Inc., which raises funds to improve health and education in the DRC. Through the foundation, Mutombo helped build a hospital in Kinshasa, which he considers “one of my biggest accomplishments in my life.”

“I knew that the ball would stop bouncing one day,” he said of his career switch. “Life has to go on.”

On perceptions of a disease that continues to have an impact on Africa, Mutombo said it is important that people have accurate information about HIV/AIDS. "Being HIV-positive does not mean you are sick. You can continue to live your life and fulfill your dream as long as you take care of yourself." He noted that another former basketball star, Magic Johnson, played pro ball while being HIV-positive.

"HIV/AIDS ... continues to be a big challenge for Africa," Mutombo said. "There are treatments, but education remains key. Like the Old Testament says, people perish because of lack of knowledge. Education will remain the source for us to save our future society."

On leadership, Mutombo said that leaders "choose to make themselves leaders." He encouraged his young chatters to "be devoted to your work, have self-discipline, devote yourself to the team and try to succeed."

"My hope is that the Africa of my ancestors will be totally different than the Africa of my descendants. You will be part of that journey."

To find out about future chats for young African leaders, tune into the YALI Network on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Photo credit: U.S. Department of State

Pro Basketball Players Teach Leadership, Teamwork in Senegal

What helps children learn leadership, character and teamwork? The NBA and USAID think one option is sports.

The U.S. National Basketball Association (NBA) has partnered with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the nonprofit Sport, Education & Economic Development (SEED) Project to launch Live, Learn and Play, a program to teach leadership, character and teamwork in Senegal.

On May 7, representatives of the three partner groups gathered on a newly renovated basketball court at the John F. Kennedy High School in Dakar. More than 100 children from participating schools were put through their paces under the tutelage of Gorgui Dieng, a forward with the NBA's Minnesota Timberwolves team, and SEED Project alumnus. Joining them was fellow Senegalese native Astou Ndiaye, a Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) legend.

Live, Learn and Play uses basketball and the values of the game as a vehicle to teach life skills and promote leadership to boys and girls between the ages of 13 and 15 in 20 schools across Senegal. Each school will conduct at least two basketball practices a week and hold games and tournaments on weekends. Practices will take place at all of the participating schools and will include both boys

and girls.

Live, Learn and Play includes a coaching-development element with a curriculum designed by the NBA and implemented by SEED. Coaches will implement the basketball curriculum locally. The program includes a mentorship component to provide coaches with a broad support network. The partners plan to expand the program to other countries in Africa.

More than 30 African players have played on NBA teams since Nigerian Hakeem Olajuwon joined the Houston Rockets in 1984. Through NBA Cares, the league has created 37 places to live, learn or play in Africa and 11 times has held Basketball Without Borders Africa camps to promote the sport and encourage positive social change in education, health and wellness.

The league opened an African headquarters in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2010 and launched the Royal Bafokeng Sport Junior NBA development program in 2011.

Photo credit: AP Images

Sport and the Power to Unite

Sport can be a hobby or a competition. Even more, “Sport can create hope where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination,” said the late South African activist and politician Nelson Mandela.

Mandela was a lifelong athlete. As a young man, he was an amateur boxer. During his 27 years in prison, he kept in shape through rigorous physical exercise.

The key moment in Mandela’s sporting life, according to *Sports Illustrated* magazine, was the 1995 Rugby World Cup in Johannesburg. Mandela had been sworn in as president of South Africa, the nation’s first black president, just a year earlier. Many of South Africa’s blacks were ambivalent about South Africa’s national team, the Springboks, which were dear to the hearts of South Africa’s white Afrikaners. Blacks saw the team as a symbol of apartheid repression. In addition, the possibility of rioting loomed over the final match between South Africa and New Zealand.

But Mandela convinced the nation to pull together as one and root for the team. South Africa went on to win the match, and South Africans, both black and white, celebrated the victory.

“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to unite in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they can understand,” Mandela said.

Photo credit: AP Images

Dr. Louis Sullivan on Leadership: Part 2

In a recent interview with the *Washington Post* newspaper, Dr. Louis Sullivan shared his perspectives on leadership. The son of a mortician who grew up in rural Georgia during segregation, Sullivan went on to graduate from Boston University School of Medicine in 1958 as the only African-American student in his class. He later became founding dean of the Morehouse School of Medicine and served as U.S. secretary of health and human services. (Morehouse College is the only all-male historically black institution of higher learning in the United States.)

This is the second of two articles adapted from that interview.

Question (Q): What do you see as the biggest leadership and management challenges that hospitals and their administrators face?

Sullivan: These are large organizations that are complex, where tremendous innovation is constantly underway. So you need to have strong leadership to manage all of this and to see that the patient always comes first. It takes strong leadership skills and technical skills to make sure that the system works effectively. That's a challenge. But it's also a great opportunity to improve ... lives.

Q: What leadership lessons did you take from your experience leading the Department of Health and Human Services?

Sullivan: When I became secretary in 1989, it was my first time in government service. Most of the 124,000 employees in the organization didn't really know me. I had a habit of walking every day for exercise, so I invited the employees to walk with me. It turned out that as I went around the country visiting our regional offices, I would have 25 to 200 of our employees join me. That was a great opportunity to get to know them, to share with them my goals for the department and to hear from them about important issues.

I call this "leadership while walking around." My tenure as secretary was greatly enhanced by building that relationship with employees.

Q: What do you believe?

Sullivan: Well, first of all, I believe in the power of information and in the value of scientific inquiry. We've seen the result of that over the course of the 20th century. We've wiped out smallpox. We've largely eliminated polio. Tuberculosis has been greatly decreased. All of these improvements and many others are the result of understanding more about biology. Knowledge really improves our world and our environment.

Finally, I believe in the fundamental goodness of people. All of us are often stressed in our lives. Not enough time, not enough resources. But when there is a time of great stress in a community, usually we come together.

Q: What's your single best piece of advice?

Sullivan: Have clear goals and work hard toward them. You'd be amazed at what you can achieve.

Photo credit: AP Images

Dr. Louis Sullivan on Leadership: Part 1

In a recent interview with the *Washington Post* newspaper, Dr. Louis Sullivan shared his perspectives on leadership. The son of a mortician who grew up in rural Georgia during segregation, Sullivan went on to graduate from Boston University School of Medicine in 1958 as the only African-American student in his class. He later became founding dean of the Morehouse School of Medicine and served as U.S. secretary of health and human services. (Morehouse College is an all-male historically black institution of higher learning in the United States.)

This is the first of two articles adapted from that interview.

Question (Q): What was your first job?

Sullivan: My first job was working in the Bird's Eye frozen food factory in upstate New York after my first year in college, during the summer of 1951. It was a hard job working the night shift. I lasted only a bit, then I went to Atlantic City and worked as a waiter. The full-time waiters there ... had skills and experience that really impressed me tremendously, and that showed me that, regardless of a person's station in life, everyone has talents that can be developed.

Q: Who has most influenced your leadership style and character?

Sullivan: My father was a tremendous role model. My father did a lot to improve the lives of blacks in rural Georgia. He formed a chapter of the NAACP (then known as the National Association of Colored People). He worked against the white primary in Georgia, which excluded blacks from participating; worked to get them registered to vote. He sued the school board to require them to improve the educational facilities for blacks.

So what I learned from my father was a combination of all of those things. That is, to accomplish significant things required vision, perseverance, courage.

I graduated from Morehouse College in 1954. ... I had lived all of my life in a segregated environment, and I decided to apply to medical school in the Northeast and the Midwest, and I was accepted at Boston University. I was the first Morehouse College graduate accepted there, and I was the only black in my class. That was a tremendously satisfying experience, to see that I had the same capabilities that my colleagues had. This led to a larger life experience, and one that gave me tremendous confidence in working to change things along the way.

Q: You've dedicated a lot of effort over your career to getting more minorities into medicine. What do you see as the biggest remaining barrier to that today?

Sullivan: There are a number of factors, but among them is the cost of medical education. The costs are high. ...

Medicine and the other health professions are science-based, but they're practiced in a social setting, and our society is becoming much more diverse racially and ethnically. This means the ability to communicate, to understand someone's value system and history, plays an important role in the outcome between the health professional and the patient. That's the rationale for having a more diverse workforce.

Opportunities should be available to anyone in our society who has the interest, the capability and the willingness to work hard to become a health professional. The financial barrier should not exist.

Photo credit: AP Images
